~~5143~~ The Snäxhom

Once a man whose home was on the lower Fraser was cooking fish with hot stones in boxes. To do it properly he needed four sets of stones. When the food was nearly ready and he was dropping one of the fourth set of stones into the box, the tongs, weakened by much hard usage, broke. The stone fell into the boiling water with a splash and he was severely burnt, because, as it was salmon time, he wore no clothing. Even in his pain he thought of man being less protected than beasts. The idea worried him and he fainted. Älquntäm saw that the man was distressed and while he was still unconscious appeared to him, saying,

"I see you are worried about your lack of clothing. I have a message for you. Strange people, somewhat resembling yourselves, are approaching from the far east. They will help you out of your trouble. You will find them cooking without the cumbersome boiling box; their houses will be warm and even have smooth coverings to the floors; there will be special places for sleeping and wonderful cooking-pots. All will be warm in these houses, yet the fire will be invisible."

As a result of this vision the man became ~~the highest type of~~ a snäxhom. In the autumn he moved towards Vancouver and built for himself a house of special type with a raised sleeping platform in it, reached by a ladder.

Älquntäm had told him to transmit this message to other tribes and for this purpose he travelled to the sites of Comox and Nanaimo, telling what he had heard in his trance. He further said that the newcomers would wear clothing, leaving only hands, feet and faces exposed. This too he had learnt from the vision. The strangers would arrive during the generation of his hearers.

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His fellow tribesmen used to eat large quantities of clams, which could be gathered only at the time of full-moon or new-moon, when the far receding tide exposed a large expanse of clam-bed. The people decided to test his power by asking him if he could not get clams at a time when the tide was medium and the beds covered. The visionary was in his room at the top of his house, but without raising his head he said:

"Yes, get ready; I will join you immediately." ~~The people did not believ~~ t

The man descended, passed through the crowd which made way for him, and went doubting to the water's edge, with eyes tightly closed. Arrived at the water he ~~put down~~ lowered his hand to feel it, then carefully put his foot under the ~~brink~~ surface, as if ~~he~~ it were a mat. He advanced with short steps, going through the motions of one who rolls back something ~~a mat~~ with his feet, and as he did so the water piled up as if it had become a mat. Thus the clam-bed was exposed. When he felt weeds under his feet he knew that the outer edge of the bed was reached and accordingly stopped, turned his back to the sea, which was now high as a wall, and restrained it with his back, without becoming wet. He called to his tribesmen who came and gathered clams, though some looked doubtfully at the wall of water before them. When all who wished to do so had gathered clams, he ordered the people to leave and returned -ed himself towards the shore. The water followed him, became normal and covered its former area.

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The details of this incident are ~~so~~ circumstantial to presuppose an historical event. Moreover, many of the ~~Bella Coola~~ old people had heard of the incident, another indication of ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the accuracy of the tradition. As far as could be judged, news of the vision must have reached Bella Coola about the year 1800(1). It is said that the snaxhom sang the following song in a language unknown to any of his hearers:

K Aqwimɛcu aqwimɛcu sisits axwamɛcɛdwisiyɛ.(2)

None of the older men appear to have any idea of the meaning of these words, or even of the language to which they belong.

(1). The approximate date was determined in the following manner:— The most complete account of the event was obtained from a man about fifty-six years of age who had heard the details from his mother. He was the youngest of a large family, so it is probable that his mother was about forty-five years of age when he was born. When she was a child of about ten, she had been told of the vision by a woman who had just passed the age of child bearing. This last woman had recently reached adolescence when news of the event reached Bella Coola. The figures can be arranged in tabular form.

Duration of the informant's life.....	56 years.
Interval between his birth and the time his mother heard the news	35 years.
Interval between transmission of the news to the informant's mother and its receipt in Bella Coola.....	35 years.
Total	131 years.

Allowing for exaggerations, this would make the correct date about 1800.

(2). A phonograph record was made of this song for the Victoria Memorial Museum, Ottawa. Recoredd as song 51, record 20; singer, Jim Pollard.

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No event has had such a profound effect on ~~The coming of the white man was the event of greatest importance in~~ the lives of the ~~Bella Coola for generations~~ as the coming of the white man. Indians of British Columbia. It would be surprising if, looking backwards, they did not feel that it had been foretold by prophets. The preceding story is the only Bella Coola example of such a belief, although tales of ~~this~~ a similar kind are found widely throughout the province. In addition, there are a few traditions of prophesies fulfilled by the white man. One of these is that, long,long ago, a shaman stated that in the future the dead would return with the ability to make fire by rubbing the end of a small twig along a rough surface, and that, soon after, all the Indians would die. The Bella Coola consider that matches are referred to in the first part of the statement, and read their own doom in the second, as indicated by ~~to which~~ the fast diminishing population. ~~indicates.~~ It is also said that about seventy-five years ago, where a party of Bella Coola camped ~~for the night~~ near Ocean Falls, ~~During the night~~ one of the sleepers wakened his comrades by calling on them to look at the brilliant lights. No one then understood what he meant, but the meaning has become clear since the installation of electric lights in the town.

In addition to the preceding, the writer recorded a number of stories of the regular shaman type in which, however, the principal figure is said to have been a snäxhom. They are included in this section for the reasons already mentioned.

The mother of an elderly Bella Coola used to receive direct communications from Ä̱lquntäm. Though she thus had the necessary qualifications for a snaxhom, she did not wish to exercise her power. This woman was able to see over the whole earth, and to talk to sun, moon, and stars in a language which the other Bella Coola did not understand. She built a small house for herself in the woods where she slept alone. Sometimes her husband joined her, but he was always afraid of the gigantic toads and other monsters which were her companions.

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universally agreed that she had justified her claims to shamanism; the coming of Thunder three times could be no accident. Alquntam had given her the power and designated Thunder as the particular supernatural being to bring it to her. From him she received his name, Xwinxwits k mlaix.

When Snuqwaix returned home to Kimsquit, she told her husband that he must never again hold intercourse with her or she would die. This is in accordance with an old tradition; at her suggestion they continued to live together, and he strictly obeyed her command for one year. Then he disobeyed it and she died immediately.

A Kimsquit Snaxom.

A Kimsquit woman, Kusiyot, claimed to be a snaxom but the Bella Coola were unconvinced. On one occasion she, and a large number of Kimsquit people, came to Bella Coola where they were entertained in the house of Potl s; guests from the whole valley came there to see her and a doubter asked her to show her power. Kusiyot complied with the request.

"I want a man with a strong wash-basin," she said.

When she had chosen her assistant she said to him:

"You shall be my medium. The people have asked for an exhibition of my skill, and I want you to repeat to the powers above what I tell you."

She said something to him, which he repeated. Kusiyot laughed.

"That is good. They are moving," she remarked, "speak to them again."

He repeated her words a second, third and fourth time at her bidding. Then she said to the spectators:

"Hide all the small children under the blankets."

Some were impressed and did as she had ordered but others were sceptical and refrained. There came a crash and a blinding light, whereupon those who had neglected to cover their children hastily did so. A second, third, and fourth peal of thunder succeeded the first till the house boards rattled. Then she said to the doubter:

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VI POWER LOCALIZED IN CERTAIN SPOTS.

To the Bella Coola mind every supernatural being is, or should be, able to move, in fact many of them can travel with phenomenal rapidity, but, in the beginning of time when Ałquntam was populating the earth, he sent down certain creatures which he later turned to stone. in this way their power became localized. The Bella Coola term for such a place is smä'tł which can be translated with accuracy as " aplace where power has become petrified" It follows that any one desirous of coming in contact with supernatural power of this type can do so by visiting the spot where it is located. There are not many such places ,

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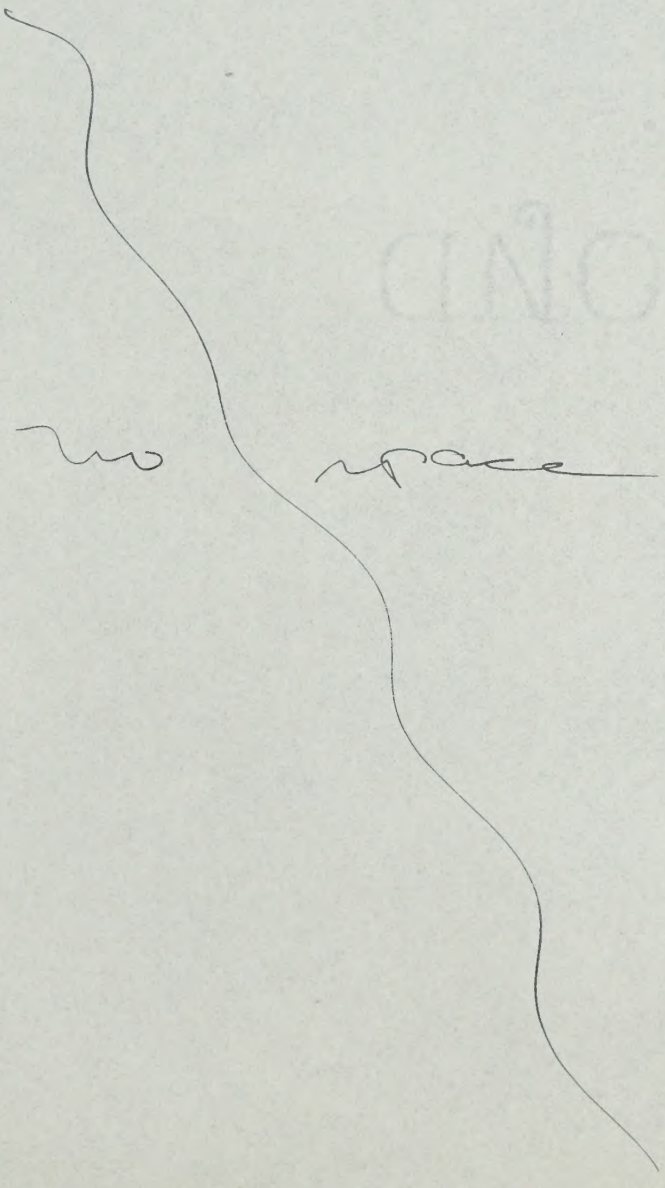
Since that time the power animating the spot has frequently become visible in the form of an enormous snake. There, too, are to be found countless smaller snakes, which delight ~~to~~ in trapping the unwary. The following stories describe the adventures of of people passing near this spot:—

The trail to the interior makes a detour to avoid ~~Sl~~Sxlekwailx, but sometimes one of the snakes, ~~and~~ many of ~~them~~ which are enormous, will be found lying across the track. If the traveller be bold and jump over the snake, no harm will come to him, but if he should try to avoid it by going around, the single snake will increase to a multitude.

The intelligence of ~~Sl~~Sxlekwailx, as well as material objects, has likewise become petrified. ~~He~~ and resents any slura ~~on his power~~.



Once four men were passing the spot on their way to the interior when one of them, in bravado, pushed with his stick against the stones which once had been the houses of the village, saying as he did so:

"ǂ!ɛxɛkwaiǂχ, petrify us if you can, we are not afraid of you"

When he drew up his stick it was covered with small snakes. These appeared from everywhere and gathered over the four like ants. They started to run, but three of them were overwhelmed by the swarming snakes and nothing was ever again heard of them. The fourth man had drawn his knife and with it slit his clothing, thus disturbing most of the snakes, but, however, had been able to run away. He succeeded in reaching some people to whom he told of the fate of his companions, but soon his stomach began to swell and he died. Snakes had entered his stomach, his case had been hopeless from the start.

On another occasion four girls had just climbed the steep and difficult trail beside the ǂ!kwi, one that is necessary, to avoid passing through the place itself.

When they reached the level land above, one of them called out:

"ǂ!ɛxɛkwaiǂχ I'm glad to be safely past you."

But the jealous ǂ!kwi heard her. He sent a gale, the ground rocked, trees were torn and broken and three of the girls were swept away to death. One only escaped by wrapping herself around the bole of a tree.

The word ǂ!kwi comes from ǂ! xl kwai